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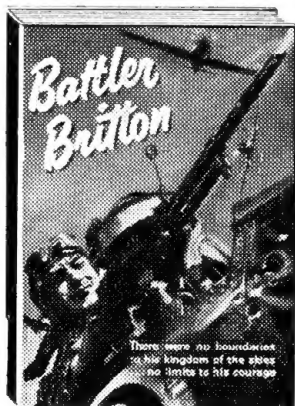
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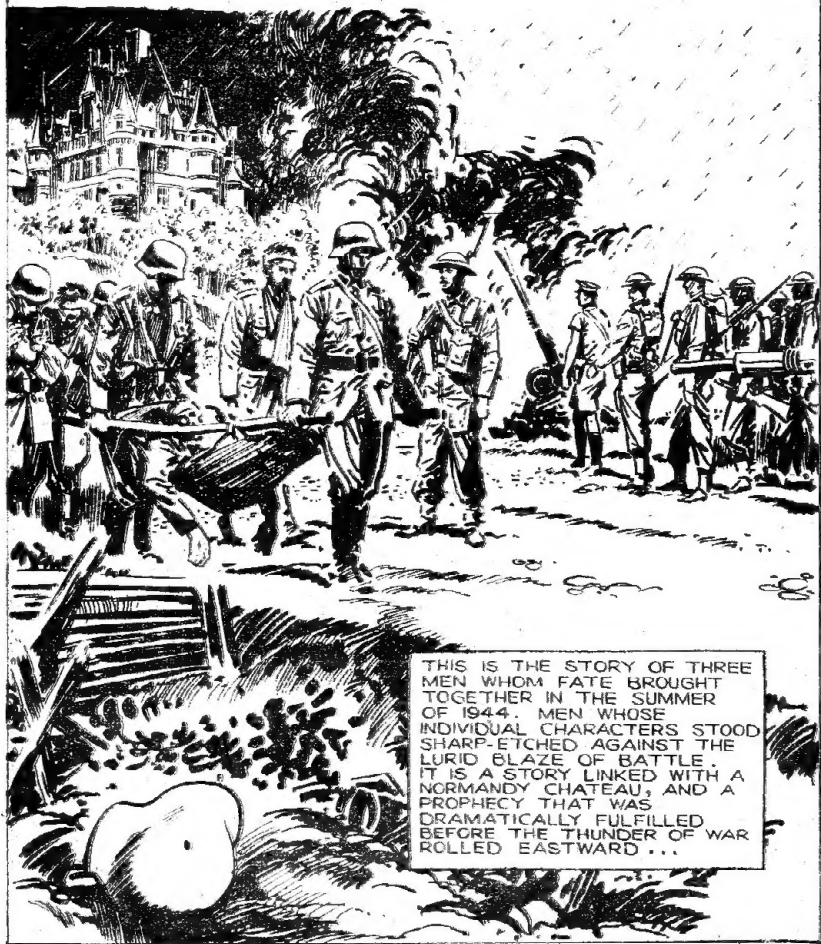
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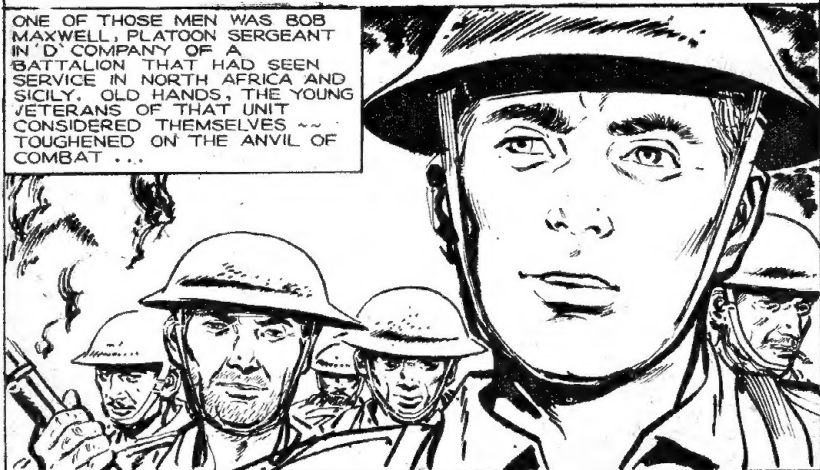
FRONT LINE



THIS IS THE STORY OF THREE MEN WHOM FATE BROUGHT TOGETHER IN THE SUMMER OF 1944. MEN WHOSE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS STOOD SHARP-ETCHED AGAINST THE LURID BLAZE OF BATTLE. IT IS A STORY LINKED WITH A NORMANDY CHATEAU, AND A PROPHECY THAT WAS DRAMATICALLY FULFILLED BEFORE THE THUNDER OF WAR ROLLED EASTWARD...

Chapter 1. BATTLE NERVES

ONE OF THOSE MEN WAS BOB MAXWELL, PLATOON SERGEANT IN 'D' COMPANY OF A BATTALION THAT HAD SEEN SERVICE IN NORTH AFRICA AND SICILY. OLD HANDS, THE YOUNG VETERANS OF THAT UNIT CONSIDERED THEMSELVES ~ TOUGHENED ON THE ANVIL OF COMBAT ~



NOW THE BATTALION WAS MOVING THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE OF NORMANDY, IN FRANCE. MOVING UP FROM RESERVE TOWARDS THE TUMULTUOUS FURY OF THE STRUGGLE FOR CAEN, VITAL RAIL AND ROAD CENTRE ...

HIMMEL, WE ARE WELL OUT OF IT! I DON'T ENVY THOSE BRITISH, ANY MORE THAN I ENVY OUR OWN COMRADES WHO ARE STILL FIGHTING IN THAT INFERNO BACK THERE!



SMOKE-PLUMES BANNERED IN THE SKY AHEAD, THICKENING ABOVE THE FLASHES OF BURSTING SHELLS AND MORTAR BOMBS. CLOSE AT HAND, THE AIR ROCKED TO THE MUZZLE-BLASTS FROM A BATTERY OF BRITISH TWENTY-FIVE POUNDERS ...

MAJOR, OUR MEN'S GUN-DRILL IS SLOPPY -- THE FLOPPIEST I'VE EVER SEEN. WHEN THEY STAND DOWN I'LL TEAR THEM OFF A STRIP -- AND THEIR TROOP COMMANDERS, TOO!

CAPTAIN CARRADINE, YOU'RE FORGETTING OUR MEN HAVE HARDLY SLEPT IN SEVENTY-TWO HOURS. IN ANY CASE, IF THEY NEED A STRIP TORN OFF THEM, I SHALL BE THE ONE TO DO IT, NOT YOU.



THE INFANTRYMEN PLODDING ALONG THE NEARBY ROAD WERE SILENT, UNNATURALLY SO. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN A SENSE OF PREMONITION CAN RUN THROUGH A WHOLE BATTALION, ESPECIALLY ONE THAT HAS SEEN PLenty OF ACTION. SERGEANT MAXWELL WAS ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF IT.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME? I'VE NEVER FELT LIKE THIS BEFORE. NOT EVEN THE FIRST TIME I CAME UNDER FIRE. BOB MAXWELL, YOU'VE GOT THE SHAKES!



D-DAY AND THE LANDING-BEACHES WERE A MONTH BEHIND THEM. THE ENEMY HAD REELED INLAND UNDER THE POWERFUL THRUST OF THE ALLIED ARMIES OF LIBERATION. BUT THE GERMANS HAD MASSED AND WERE HITTING BACK -- WITH A VENGEANCE ...



HE WAS RIGHT. THE PLATOON WAS FIFTY YARDS FROM THE VILLAGE WHEN A SALVO CAME SCREECHING THROUGH THE SKY. WITH THE INSTINCT OF EXPERIENCED CAMPAIGNERS, THE MEN DIVED FOR A CONVENIENT DITCH. IT WAS AWASH WITH STAGNANT WATER, BUT INVITING ...



BOB MAXWELL SAID NOTHING: HIS HEART WAS THUMPING, HIS NERVES QUIVERING LIKE FENCE-WIRES IN A HURRICANE. HE COULD NOT TRUST HIMSELF TO SPEAK, LEST HIS VOICE BETRAY THE TENSION THAT HAD GRIPPED HIM...



THE SERGEANT JERKED HIMSELF ERECT AS HE HEARD THE VOICE OF HIS PLATOON COMMANDER, LIEUTENANT BRODIE. HE MUSTERED UP A BARRACK-SQUARE BELLOW THAT BROUGHT THE MEN SCRAMBLING BACK ON TO THE ROAD.



AT NIGHTFALL, THEY TOOK OVER FROM A BATTERED FRONT-LINE UNIT FROM ANOTHER BRIGADE. AS THE MOON ROSE, THEY WERE AWAITING H-HOUR -- THE APPOINTED HOUR FOR AN ATTACK THEY WERE TO LAUNCH ...



SILENCE REIGNED NOW, ELECTRIC WITH MENACE LIKE THE QUIET BEFORE AN IMPENDING STORM. IT BORE DOWN ON BOB MAXWELL OPPRESSIVELY. SWEAT-BEADS GLISTENED ON HIS FACE.



ANY SECOND NOW OUR ARTILLERY WILL BE STARTING UP.

I SHALL BE ALL RIGHT ONCE WE GO IN -- I MUST BE!

THE FIRST FLIGHT OF SHELLS MOANED OVERHEAD AND SMASHED INTO THE ENEMY LINES. THEY STRUCK THE OPENING CHORD IN A POUNDING ORCHESTRATION THAT FILLED THE NIGHT WITH CLAMOUR.

THE JERRIES AIN'T HALF CATCHING IT!

YOU WAIT -- WE'LL CATCH IT, TOO, 'FORE THE NIGHT'S OUT! I FEEL IT IN MY BONES!



KHAKI-CLAD FIGURES CLIMBED FROM SLIT TRENCHES, ADVANCING IN EXTENDED LINE. SIXTEEN PLATOON WAS THE SPEARHEAD FOR D COMPANY.



CORPORAL DIXON, DON'T LET YOUR SECTION BUNCH UP ON THE RIGHT THERE. KEEP OPENED UP!

MAXWELL WONDERED IF HIS VOICE SOUNDED AS SHAKY TO DIXON AS IT DID TO HIMSELF. BUT AT LEAST HE COULD STILL THINK OF THE MEN -- AND THE RISK THEY WOULD RUN IF THEY CROWDED TOGETHER INTO AN EASY TARGET ...



SO FAR SO GOOD, SERGEANT. NOT A SHOT'S BEEN FIRED AT US AS YET. IT MAY BE THE ARTILLERY BARRAGE WILL GET US ON TO THE OBJECTIVE WITHOUT OPPOSITION.

I WOULDN'T BANK ON THAT, SIR. IF YOU ASK ME, JERRY IS STORING SOMETHING UP FOR US.

THE BARRAGE LIFTED
AS THEY NEARED
THEIR OBJECTIVE ~
AND THEN THE
ENEMY STRUCK!



TRACER BULLETS LACED THE NIGHT IN SCARLET PATTERNS,
MORTARS COUGHED WICKEDLY AND THEIR BOMBS BURST WITH
SHATTERING CONCUSSIONS AMONG THE BRITISH INFANTRY...



BUT STILL THEY MOVED ON -- DARK FIGURES SHARPLY SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE BRIEF, VIVID FLARE OF THE EXPLOSIONS . .



ONE ENEMY SHELL EXPLODED ALMOST AT THE FEET OF LIEUTENANT BRODIE, HIS BATMAN AND SERGEANT BOB MAXWELL . . .



DAZELED, BOB MAXWELL PICKED HIMSELF UP. FEAR WHIPPED AT HIM. MOMENTARILY HE HAD A FRANTIC DESIRE TO TURN AND RUN. HE FOUGHT DOWN THE IMPULSE...

ARE YOU
OKAY, BELLAMY?
WHAT ABOUT THE
LIEUTENANT?

H-HE'S...DEAD,
SERGEANT!

ALL ALONG THE LINE THE BATTALION WAS SUFFERING HEAVY CASUALTIES. BUT THE ATTACK DID NOT FALTER. SUDDENLY BOB FOUND HIMSELF ONLY YARDS FROM A GERMAN MACHINE-GUN NEST...



THE SERGEANT SAW THAT THE SPANDAU WAS FIRING AT CORPORAL DIXON'S SECTION AND HE IMMEDIATELY TOSSED A MILLS THIRTY-SIX WITH A HAND NOT SO STEADY AS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN -- BUT STEADY ENOUGH ...



BUT IT WAS NO TIME FOR CONGRATULATIONS. AS THE ACRID SMOKE OF THE GRENADE'S EXPLOSION SWIRLED AWAY, AN OMINOUS CLANKING AND A ROARING OF ENGINES CAUGHT THE SERGEANT'S EAR ...



THREE MORE TANKS LUMBERED AFTER THE FIRST. THEY BATTERED THEIR WAY THROUGH THE HEDGE AND FANNED OUT, THE FOREMOST SWINGING ROUND TOWARDS BOB MAXWELL AND BELLAMY ...



THE TANK'S HEAVY MACHINE-GUN THUDDING INTO LIFE AND A STREAM OF SHELLS LASHED BOB AND BELLAMY INTO FRENZIED ACTIVITY.



THE TWO MEN DESPERATELY HURLED THEMSELVES OVER THE RAISED LIP OF THE WEAPON-PIT AS THE EARTH WAS RIPPED UP ALL ABOUT THEM ...



STILL THE MECHANISED MONSTER LURCHED MENACINGLY TOWARDS THEM, BUT TWO BRITISH TANK-DESTROYERS WERE MOVING UP FAST IN SUPPORT OF THE BATTALION: THE LONG, GLEAMING GUN OF ONE OF THEM CRASHED INTO ACTION ...



THE ARMOUR PIERCING SHELL SLAMMED INTO THE GERMAN TANK WHICH SLEWED DRUNKENLY INTO THE HEDGE. ITS HATCH FLEW OPEN AND A TATTERED FIGURE SPILLED FROM IT, SOLE SURVIVOR OF ITS CREW...



A SHOT FROM THE SECOND TANK-DESTROYER HAMMERED THROUGH THE HULL OF ANOTHER NAZI BATTLE-WAGON AND IT EXPLODED INTO A FLAMING WRECK. THE REMAINING TWO CIRCLED ROUND AND BACK-TRACKED RAPIDLY ...



AS BOB MAXWELL AND BELLAMY CRAWLED THANKFULLY FROM THEIR REFUGE, GERMANS WERE SURRENDERING FROM THEIR DEFENSIVE POSITIONS ALL ALONG THE HEDGE-ROW ...



SIXTEEN PLATOON HAD SUSTAINED THIRTY PER CENT LOSSES. OTHER PLATOONS HAD FARED WORSE. BUT THE THINNED-OUT BATTALION REORGANISED ON THE OBJECTIVE WITH FIERCE ENERGY TAKING OVER ENEMY WEAPON-PITS, DIGGING FRESH SLIT TRENCHES WHERE NECESSARY.



BOB'S COMPANY COMMANDER MADE A QUICK AND APPRECIATIVE SCRUTINY OF SIXTEEN PLATOON'S DISPOSITIONS . . .

I WAS SORRY TO HEAR ABOUT BRODIE, SERGEANT. BUT WITH YOU IN CONTROL HERE, THIS PLATOON IS IN GOOD HANDS. YOU'VE GOT YOUR MEN WELL SITED.

I WISH I'D AS MUCH FAITH IN MYSELF AS THE MAJOR SEEMS TO HAVE IN ME. HE DOESN'T KNOW HOW NEAR I'VE BEEN TO BREAKING TONIGHT!



BOB WAS NOT GIVEN TO DEEP THINKING. IF HE HAD BEEN, HE MIGHT HAVE RECOGNISED IN HIMSELF THE FIRST SYMPTOMS OF BATTLE EXHAUSTION . . .

KEEP YOUR MEN ON THEIR TOES, SERGEANT. FOR YOU CAN BE SURE OF ONE THING -- JERRY WON'T LOSE ANY TIME IN MOUNTING A COUNTER-ATTACK!

I'M SURE OF SOMETHING ELSE, MAJOR. IF I COME THROUGH THIS, I'M TURNING IN MY STRIPES. AS A SERGEANT, I'VE HAD IT!

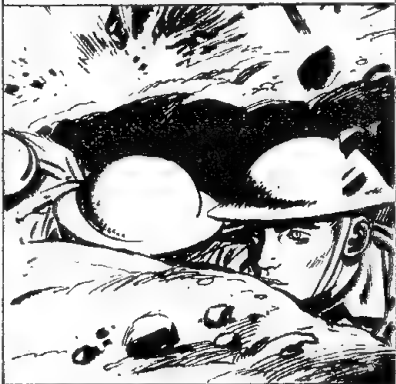


HE WAS SUFFERING FROM A CONDITION THAT COULD EAT INTO THE BEST OF MEN. ESPECIALLY MEN WHO HAD SEEN LONG AND ARDUOUS FIGHTING. BUT IT WAS A CONDITION THAT SOME HAD THE TEMPERAMENT TO OVERCOME ...

A MAN HAS NO RIGHT TO BE IN CHARGE OF OTHERS WHEN HE KNOWS HE'S LIABLE TO CRACK! THE POINT IS, CAN I LAST OUT UNTIL WE'RE PULLED BACK INTO RESERVE?



HE WAS SOON PUT TO THE TEST AGAIN. EASTWARD, THE SKY SUDDENLY DANCED TO THE FLICKER OF ENEMY GUNFIRE. BEFORE THE RUMBLE OF THE GERMAN ARTILLERY COULD REACH HIS EARS, A CLUSTER OF SHELLS BLUDGEONED INTO THE GROUND CLOSE BY ...



SALVO AFTER SALVO SWEEPED DOWN THROUGH THE NIGHT. THE SHELLS CAME WITH A RUSTLING WHINE THAT GATHERED TO A SCREAM AND ENDED IN JOLTING, EAR-SPLITTING THUNDER-CLAPS. THE EARTH SHIVERED, AND ERUPTED FLAME AND DEBRIS ...



FOR WHAT SEEMED AN ETERNITY, THE BATTALION HAD TO ENDURE THAT FRIGHTFUL STRAFING FROM GERMAN HEAVY GUNS. THEN THE GUNFIRE CEASED ~ AND IN THE SMOKE-DRIFT OF THE BOMBARDMENT, DIMLY-SEEN SHAPES MATERIALISED ...



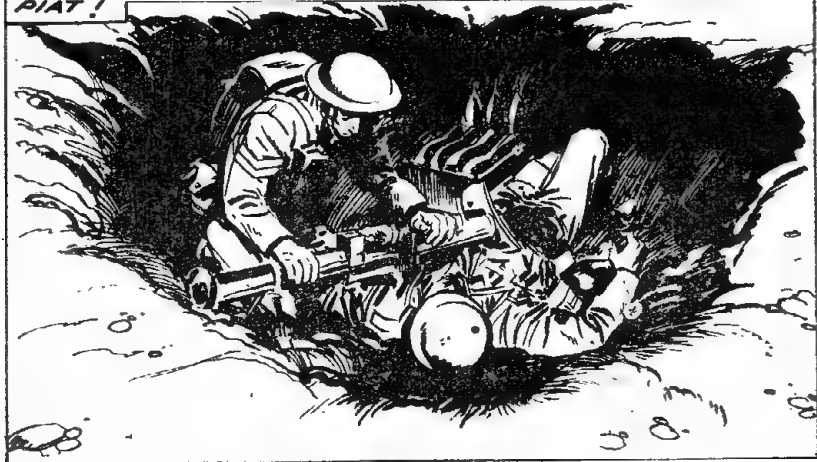
NAZI INFANTRYMEN SURGED FORWARD THROUGH THE FOG OF BATTLE. FROM THEIR SLIT TRENCHES, THE BRITISH OPENED UP ~ WITH A FIRE DEVASTATING IN SPITE OF THEIR DEPLETED NUMBERS. THE LINES OF GREY-CLAD TROOPS FLINCHED, MELTED AWAY ...



BUT FRESH WAVES SWARMED INTO VIEW, PRECEDED BY ARMOUR. BRITISH ARTILLERY LAID ON A CONCENTRATION IN ANSWER TO AN URGENT CALL FROM BATTALION HEADQUARTERS. IT FAILED TO STEM THE GERMAN ASSAULT ...



CORPORAL DIXON MADE A DASH FROM COVER. BULLETS SNAPPED AT HIM BUT HE DIVED UNHARMED INTO A WEAPON-PIT WHERE A DEAD COMRADE LAY -- LIFELESS HAND RESTING ON A WEAPON THAT WAS AN INFANTRYMAN'S ANSWER TO AN ARMoured FIGHTING VEHICLE -- THE PIAT!



HE PULLED HIMSELF CAUTIOUSLY TO THE RIM OF THE HOLE, CLAPPED A BOMB IN POSITION, LINED THE PIAT UP ON THE TANK ...



HOT STEEL LASHED THE PARAPET CLOSE TO DIXON'S ELBOW, BUT HE COOLLY TRIGGERED THE PIAT AND THE BOMB SLAPPED HOME ...



AS THE TANK JERKED TO A STANDSTILL, A SECOND BOMB SET IT AFIRE ...



THE GERMANS ON SIXTEEN PLATOON'S FRONT WERE REPELLED. BUT MORE POWERFUL AND DETERMINED DRIVES HAD BEEN MADE AGAINST OTHER PLATOONS ON THE RIGHT AND LEFT, DESPITE THE COUNTER FIRE FROM THE BRITISH TANK DESTROYERS ...



THE GUNNERS OF THE TWO MOBILE GUNS FOUGHT A GALLANT ACTION AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS. LIKE THE INFANTRYMEN THEY HAD TRIED DESPERATELY TO SUPPORT, THEY FELL AT THEIR POSTS ...



SIXTEEN PLATOON WERE ISOLATED. EVEN IN THE SMOKE-LADEN, SWIRLING CHAOS OF THE BATTLE, THAT MUCH WAS DISASTROUSLY CLEAR TO BOB MAXWELL AND HIS MEN ...



BOB CHOKED DOWN A MIRTHLESS LAUGH. SO SIXTEEN PLATOON WAS TO WITHDRAW. WHERE TO -- WITH THE GERMANS SWEEPING AHEAD OF THEM ON THE FLANKS? BUT HE TOLD BELLAMY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE ORDER, FOR WHAT IT WAS WORTH ...



HE SPEEDILY LEARNED THAT COMPANY H.Q. NO LONGER EXISTED. THE MESSAGE RECEIVED BY BELLAMY HAD BEEN THE LAST TRANSMITTED FROM IT, JUST BEFORE IT HAD BEEN WIPED OUT. BATTALION H.Q. HAD SHARED ITS FATE, AS HAD EVERY OTHER HEADQUARTERS IN THE UNIT ...

MAKE FOR THAT WOOD! QUICK, WHILE OUR ARTILLERY'S HITTING THE JERRIES -- AND BEFORE IT STARTS BEATING US UP AS WELL!



THE CONFUSION AMONG THE GERMANS HELPED BOB AND HIS MEN. THEY GAINED THE WOOD -- OR MOST OF THEM DID. BELLAMY, CARRYING THE RADIO SET, WAS LAGGING AT THE REAR AND FELL WHEN A SHELL-BURST MUSHROOMED VIOLENTLY BEHIND THE REST OF THE PARTY ...



THE REMNANTS OF SIXTEEN PLATOON REACHED THE FAR EDGE OF THE COPSE AS DAY WAS BREAKING. IN THE HAGGARD DAWN, THEY SAW THE CHATEAU NEAR VILLIERS-ROYAN. IT STOOD SERENE. TO BOB MAXWELL IT LOOKED LIKE A HAVEN ...



LITTLE DID THE SERGEANT KNOW IT WAS TO PROVE ANYTHING BUT A HAVEN. LITTLE DID HE KNOW ...

Chapter 2. CHATEAU OF DESTINY

OTHER EYES WERE FIXED ON THAT STATELY CHATEAU IN THE WAN LIGHT OF THE NEW DAY. THEY WERE THE EYES OF A GROUP OF BRITISH ARTILLERY OFFICERS ...

NOBODY HAS A CLUE AS TO WHAT'S GOING ON. THOSE CHAPS ON THE ROAD HAVE BEEN PULLED BACK, BUT AREN'T SURE WHY. IT'S MY GUESS THAT JERRY HAS SMASHED THROUGH!

WE OUGHT TO GET OUR GUNS AWAY FROM HERE, CAPTAIN!

WHEN I WANT YOUR ADVICE I'LL ASK FOR IT! I'M GOING UP TO THAT CHATEAU TO FIND OUT WHAT I CAN SEE FROM THERE.

THE CAPTAIN'S MANNER WAS ARROGANT, WHICH WAS NOTHING UNUSUAL FOR HIM. HE WAS TEMPORARILY IN CHARGE, HIS BATTERY COMMANDER HAVING BEEN SUMMONED TO REGIMENTAL HEADQUARTERS ...

YOU NEVER GET A CIVIL WORD OUT OF CARRADINE ~ THE FELLOW'S NOT HUMAN!

I WISH THE MAJOR WOULD GET BACK. MAYBE HE'S ON HIS WAY. WE JUST DON'T KNOW. THE SIGNALLERS CAN'T GET A CHEEP OUT OF REGIMENTAL H.Q. COMMUNICATIONS HAVE COMPLETELY BROKEN DOWN.

THEY WATCHED CARRADINE'S STIFF, UNBENDING FIGURE CLIMB TOWARDS THE CHATEAU. BEFORE LONG THE CAPTAIN WAS AT ITS PORTALS ...



IF I HAD FULL COMMAND OF THE BATTERY I'D GIVE IT A TASTE OF REAL DISCIPLINE / NOT THAT THE MAJOR TOLERATES SLACKNESS. BUT I DON'T HOLD WITH HIS KID-GLOVE APPROACH OR THE FATHERLY INTEREST HE TAKES IN THE MEN. IN SOME RESPECTS HE'S A FOOL!

HE WAS IMPRESSED BY THE SPLENDOUR OF THE CHATEAU'S FURNISHINGS WHEN HE ENTERED IT. BUT HE WAS NOT THERE TO ADMIRE AN ANCIENT RESIDENCE FROM WHICH WAR HAD DRIVEN THE OCCUPANTS. IN THE EAST WING HE FOUND A ROOM WITH AN EXTENSIVE VIEW OF THE COUNTRYSIDE ...

THERE'S SOME OF OUR ARMOUR COMING THROUGH THE VILLAGE. WHOEVER IS IN COMMAND OF IT MAY BE ABLE TO SAY WHAT'S HAPPENING -- IF ANYBODY DOWN AT THE BATTERY HAS THE SENSE TO ASK!



CARRADINE WATCHED THE COLUMN OF TANKS ASCEND FROM VILLIERS-ROYAN. THE FOREMOST LUMBERED UP TO THE CREST OF THE ROAD ... AND ALL AT ONCE, THE CAPTAIN GAPED IN SHOCKED REALISATION!



LIKE A MAN POSSESSED, THE ARTILLERY OFFICER RUSHED BACK THROUGH THE CHATEAU. AS HE PLUNGED OUT ACROSS THE THRESHOLD, HE HEARD THE CRACK OF THE LEADING TANK'S GUN ...



THE ENEMY ARMOUR STORMED DOWN ON THE BATTERY, PUMPING SHELLS AT THE TWENTY-FIVE POUNDERS, SPRAYING THEIR CREWS WITH BULLETS. NUMBERS, FIRE-POWER, THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE, ALL WERE IN THE GERMANS' FAVOUR ...



THE MEN OF THE BATTERY FOUGHT THEIR GUNS TO THE LAST. THEY TOOK TOLL OF THE ENEMY, BUT FROM THE OUTSET THE ISSUE WAS NEVER IN DOUBT. AND UP AT THE CHATEAU, CARRADINE LOOKED ON HELPLESSLY -- A REMOTE EYE-WITNESS TO A SCENE OF SLAUGHTER ...



THE GERMAN TANKS SURGED ON IN QUEST OF FURTHER PREY. CARRADINE STAYED WHERE HE WAS, GLARING DOWN AT THE HAVOC LEFT IN THEIR WAKE, HIS MIND FILLED WITH ANGRY CONDEMNATION ...

A WHOLE BATTERY WIPED OUT IN MINUTES -- BECAUSE IT COULDN'T COPE WITH AN EMERGENCY! IF I'D BEEN DOWN THERE IT WOULD'VE BEEN A DIFFERENT STORY. I'D HAVE BEEN EQUAL TO THE SITUATION ALL RIGHT!



FUTILE RAGE COLOURED THE EMOTIONS OF THIS MAN TO WHOM DISCIPLINE WAS A FETISH. PITY DID NOT TEMPER THE IRON IN HIS SOUL, NOR ANY SELF-CRITICISM. THERE WAS NOT EVEN ROOM IN HIS THOUGHTS FOR A GRUDGING TRIBUTE TO THE VALOUR OF FALLEN COMRADES ...



CARRADINE GAVE A START AND LOOKED ROUND. HE SAW BOB MAXWELL AND A STRAGGLE OF BEGRIMED, BATTLE-WEARY INFANTRYMEN. HIS FACE TIGHTENED. HE WAS IN NO MOOD TO LOOK ON ANYONE WITH A FAVOURABLE EYE ...



THE SERGEANT WAS TAKEN ABACK. HE GAPED AT THE ARTILLERY CAPTAIN, THEN STRAIGHTENED HIS TIRED BODY WITH A JERK. HE REELED OFF HIS NAME AND UNIT, RELATED WHAT HE KNEW OF THE GERMAN BREAK-THROUGH...



FIRST BOB INSPECTED THE PLATOON WEAPONS. NEXT HE AND HIS MEN CLEANED UP, DRAWING ON THE CHATEAU'S WATER-SUPPLY. THEN HE GAVE PERMISSION FOR EMERGENCY RATIONS TO BE EATEN. THEY WERE MUNCHING THE ISSUE OF BRICK-HARD CHOCOLATE WHEN THE NAZI TANKS REAPPEARED IN THE DISTANCE ...

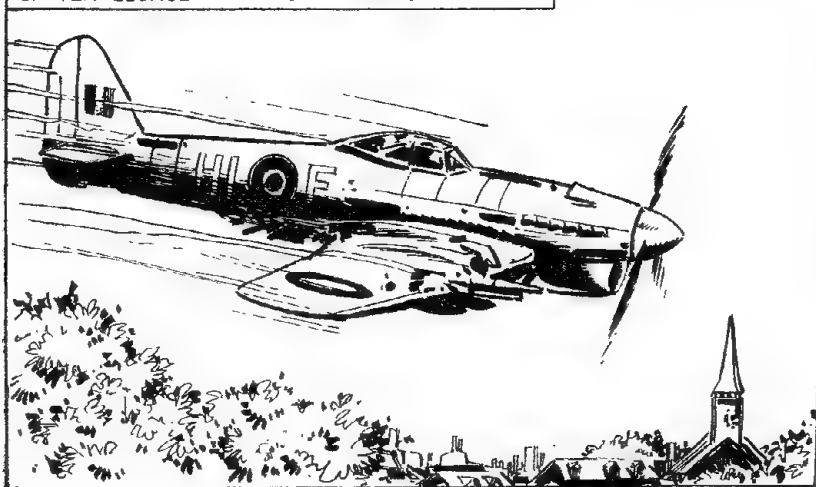


THE ENEMY ARMoured VEHICLES RUMBLED EASTWARD IN THE DIRECTION OF VILLIERS-ROYAN ...

THOSE TANKS EITHER RAN INTO STRONG OPPOSITION SOMEWHERE WEST OF HERE, OR THEY'VE TURNED BACK BECAUSE THEY WERE OUTRUNNING THEIR FUEL.



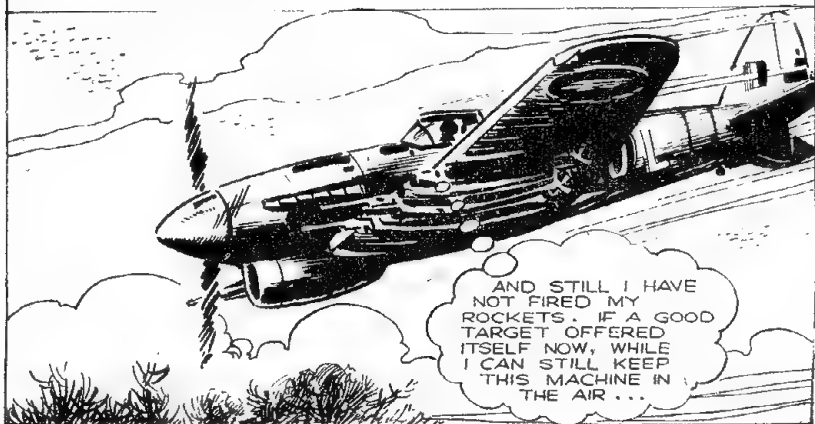
THE AIRCRAFT WAS FLYING LOW, AND ON AN UNEVEN COURSE. IT WAS IN TROUBLE ...



IT WAS A BRITISH ROCKET TYPHOON. BUT ITS PILOT WAS NOT BRITISH IN NAME OR NATIONALITY -- JEAN BAYARD, OF THE FREE FRENCH AIR FORCE, FIGHTING FOR THE LIBERATION OF HIS COUNTRY FROM THE GERMAN YOKE ...



FANCIFULLY, WHEN TAKING OFF ON A MISSION, BAYARD HAD OFTEN COMPARED HIMSELF WITH A KNIGHT ERRANT. TO HIM, CLIMBING INTO HIS AIRCRAFT HAD BEEN LIKE GIRDING ON HIS SUIT OF ARMOUR FOR SINGLE COMBAT. BUT NOW HIS SUIT OF ARMOUR SEEMED IN DANGER OF FALLING APART ...



THERE WAS A GOOD TARGET AHEAD -- IN THE SHAPE OF GERMAN TROOPS AND TRANSPORT. YET HE BALKED AT THE IDEA OF STRIKING AT THAT PARTICULAR TARGET.

THE TYPHOON IS TURNING AWAY, CARL! THE FILCH MUST HAVE LOST HIS NERVE!

IT WAS NOT FEAR, HOWEVER, THAT HAD CAUSED THE YOUNG FRENCHMAN TO SWERVE ASIDE FROM THE VILLAGE ...

I SALUTE YOU, VILLIERS-ROYAN. YOU'RE SAFE FROM ME -- AS SAFE AS THE OLD CHATEAU. JEAN BAYARD DOES NOT STRIKE AT PLACES THAT MEAN SO MUCH TO HIM.

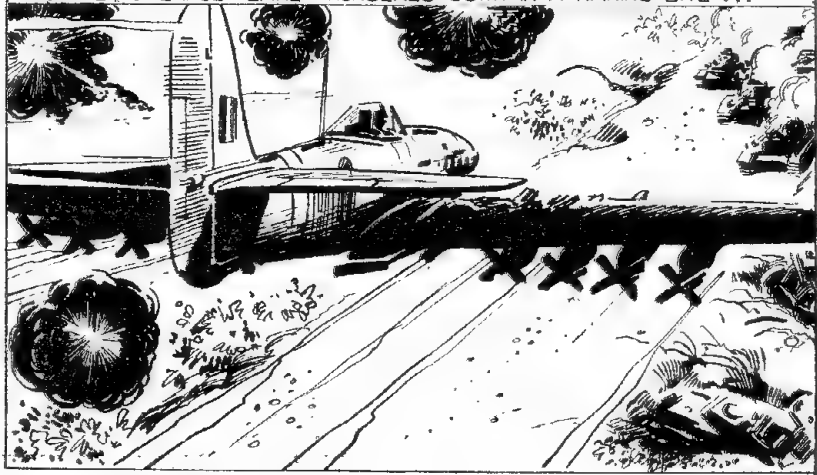


THEN HE SAW THE GERMAN TANKS THAT WERE RETURNING FROM THEIR WESTWARD FORAY ...

AH, THOSE LUMBERING TIN CANS ARE MORE TO MY LIKING! I CAN ATTACK THEM BEFORE THEY REACH THE VILLAGE!



HE ALTERED COURSE AGAIN--BUT GENTLY, FOR HE HAD TO COAX THE TYPHOON. SHE WAS ANSWERING THE CONTROLS NONE TOO READILY, BUT HE MANAGED TO LINE HER UP. THEN HE EASED THE STICK FORWARD AND THE POWERFUL PLANE THUNDERED DOWN IN A RAKING DIVE ...



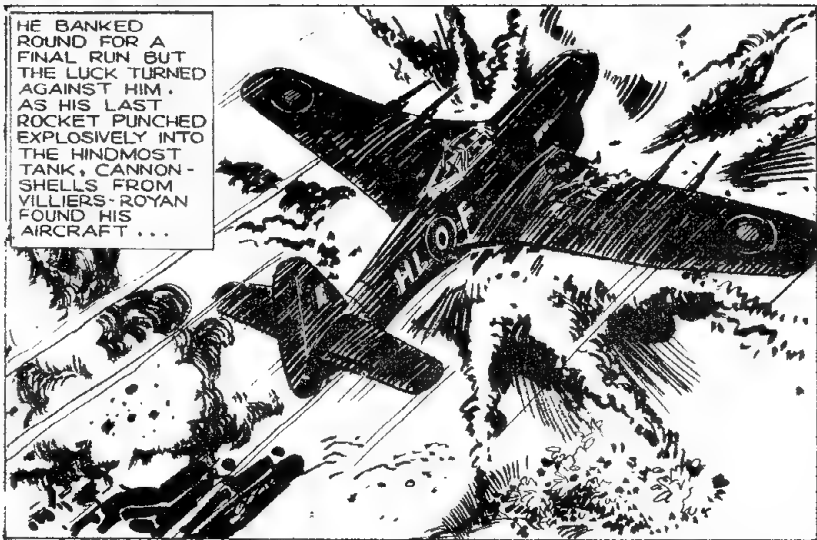
GERMAN ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE FROM THE VILLAGE HOSED UP MENACINGLY AT THE TYPHOON, BUT RIPPED PAST, WIDE OF THE MARK. ANOTHER MOMENT AND THE LEADING TANK IN THE GERMAN COLUMN WAS RENT ASUNDER BY THE IMPACT OF A ROCKET ...



BAYARD BLAZED A TRAIL OF DEVASTATION FROM END TO END OF THAT ARMoured COLUMN, DESTROYING THREE OF THE STEEL-CLAD GIANTS BEFORE THE FORMATION HAD TIME TO SCATTER ...



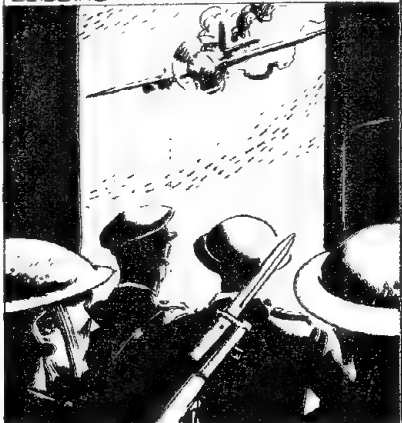
HE BANKED ROUND FOR A FINAL RUN BUT THE LUCK TURNED AGAINST HIM. AS HIS LAST ROCKET PUNCHED EXPLOSIVELY INTO THE HINDMOST TANK, CANNON-SHELLS FROM VILLIERS-ROYAN FOUND HIS AIRCRAFT ...



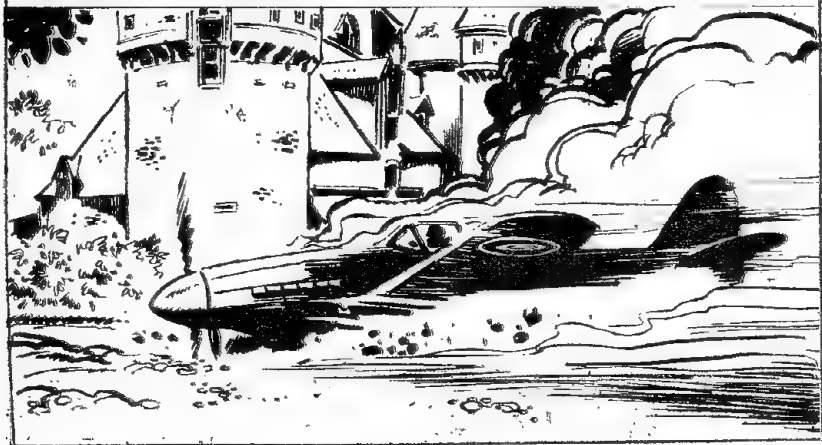
THE UNDERSIDE OF THE TYPHOON WAS RAKED FROM END TO END, THE UNDERCARRIAGE WAS JAMMED, THE PUMP AND COOLING SYSTEM WRECKED. THE MOTOR STOPPED DEAD AND BLACK SMOKE AND GLYCOL BELCHED FROM THE ENGINE COWLING...



THE CHATEAU LOOMED BEFORE JEAN. THEN HE WAS FIGHTING FOR TEMPORARY MASTERY OF HIS AIRCRAFT, SEEKING TO PULL HER CLEAR OF COLLISION WITH THE STONE FACADE OF THE HISTORIC BUILDING...



WITH A LAST MINUTE EFFORT HE MANAGED TO SWING HARD LEFT. THE TYPHOON WAS LOSING HEIGHT FAST. HER NOSE DIPPED SUDDENLY, FRIGHTENINGLY. SOMEHOW HE SUCCEEDED IN TRIMMING HER JUST BEFORE SHE HIT, AND SHE SCRAPED DOWN IN A PANCAKE LANDING THAT GOUGED A GIANT FURROW THROUGH THE EARTH.



THE HEAVY FIGHTER PLOUGHED TO A STANDSTILL AND JEAN BAYARD FELT THE FEARFUL TENSION DRAIN FROM HIS MUSCLES. THEN HE STRUGGLED OUT OF HIS HARNESS AND CLAMBERED FROM HIS COCKPIT.



JEAN WAS GRINNING AS THE GROUP FROM THE CHATEAU JOINED HIM. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THEIR CONGRATULATIONS ON HIS SAFE TOUCH-DOWN AND INTRODUCED HIMSELF ...

DID YOU SAY BAYARD ? THAT'S A DISTINGUISHED NAME .



CARRADINE HAD A SNOB'S REVERENCE FOR RANK AND HIGH DEGREE AND A SNOB'S CAPACITY FOR BELITTLING OTHERS HE CONSIDERED BENEATH HIM. HE SPOKE SNEERINGLY TO BOB MAXWELL ...



JEAN WALKED ROUND TO THE FRONT OF THE CHATEAU. THE OTHERS FOLLOWED. AT THE MAIN ENTRANCE, HE TURNED AND FACED THEM SMILINGLY ...



THE YOUNG FRENCHMAN BECKONED CARRADINE INTO THE GREAT HALL-WAY OF THE CHATEAU. THERE HE POINTED TO A MOTTO IN THE STONEWORK ABOVE A MASSIVE FIREPLACE...

SEE, MON CAPITAINE. 'SANS PEUR ET SANS REPROCHE' -- WITHOUT FEAR AND WITHOUT REPROACH -- THE WORDS WHICH WERE APPLIED TO MY FAMOUS ANCESTOR.

A QUIZZICAL LOOK FLICKERED INTO JEAN BAYARD'S EYES...

YOU KNOW, THERE IS A LEGEND CONNECTED WITH THE CHATEAU. IT IS SAID IT WILL STAND ONLY AS LONG AS THERE IS A MALE BAYARD REMAINING ALIVE IN THIS BRANCH OF THE FAMILY. A FOOLISH LEGEND, NO DOUBT, BUT I REMEMBERED IT JUST NOW. YOU SEE, THE MALE LINE ENDS WITH ME.

BOB MAXWELL MARCHED OVER TO JEAN AND CARRADINE. PRACTICAL, DOWN-TO-EARTH, HE BROUGHT THEM BACK FROM THE ROMANTIC PAST TO THE URGENT PRESENT.

YES, WHAT IS IT?

EXCUSE ME, SIR, BUT HADN'T WE BETTER GET AWAY WHILE THE GOING'S GOOD?

THE SERGEANT'S RIGHT. THE BOCHES ARE IN VILLIERS-ROYAN SOON THEY MAY BE UP HERE, IF ONLY TO SEARCH FOR MY PLANE.

CARRADINE HAD OTHER IDEAS. HE WAS NOT LACKING IN ABILITY AS A GUNNER OFFICER. BESIDES, HE HAD AN EYE TO COMMENDATION-- PROMOTION -- MAYBE A DECORATION ...

I SEE A WAY OF DOING A USEFUL JOB HERE, BAYARD. IF I COULD GET IN TOUCH WITH MY REGIMENTAL H.Q., I'D BE ABLE TO DIRECT ARTILLERY FIRE ON TO THE ENEMY. AND YOU COULD HELP -- PROVIDING THE RADIO IN YOUR PLANE WILL STILL FUNCTION.

WE CAN SOON FIND OUT. BUT I MAKE ONE CONDITION -- DON'T BRING DOWN FIRE ON VILLIERS-ROYAN. ITS HOUSES ARE THE HOMES OF MY PEOPLE.



AS CARRADINE ACCOMPANIED JEAN TO THE WRECKED TYPHOON, HE MADE IT PLAIN THAT VILLIERS-ROYAN MIGHT NECESSARILY HAVE TO SUFFER ...

THIS IS WAR, BAYARD, AND YOU MUST UNDERSTAND IT LEAVES NO ROOM FOR SENTIMENT.

NEVERTHELESS, I'LL STOP YOU AT ALL COSTS FROM DIRECTING THE GUNS ON TO THE VILLAGE -- HOWEVER ESSENTIAL YOU THINK THAT MAY BE! I FIGHT THIS WAR IN MY OWN WAY, AND NOT ACCORDING TO THE RULES OF A SOULLESS MILITARY MACHINE!



THE RADIO WAS OPERATIVE...YET BAYARD COULD NOT RAISE HIS SQUADRON H.Q., NOR ANY ARMY WIRELESS STATIONS WHICH WORKED ON A VERY DIFFERENT RANGE OF FREQUENCIES. BUT ALL AT ONCE HE GAVE AN EXCLAMATION ...

HAH! HOW UNPREDICTABLE WIRELESS CAN BE! I CAN MAKE NO CONTACT WITH ANY UNIT NEAR HERE. BUT SUDDENLY I FIND MYSELF LINKED UP WITH AN AIR FORCE BASE IN ENGLAND!



THAT'S NO HELP!

BUT THE CAPTAIN WAS WRONG. IN AN OPERATIONS ROOM AWAY ACROSS THE CHANNEL AN OFFICER WITH INITIATIVE AND AUTHORITY SAW A POSSIBLE MEANS OF RELAYING BAYARD'S CALL ...

IT'S A SIGNAL FROM A FREE FRENCH TYPE IN NORMANDY, SIR. HE'S SPEAKING FOR A GUNNER CAPTAIN. HE WANTS TO CONNECT UP WITH AN ARTILLERY UNIT SO IT CAN CLOBBER A CROWD OF JERRIES WHO'VE BROKEN THROUGH THE ALLIED FRONT.



WE'RE IN COMMUNICATION WITH R.A.F. H.Q. IN NORMANDY. PASS THE SIGNAL ON TO THEM. THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

AT A CAPTURED GERMAN AIRFIELD AWAY BEHIND THE BATTLE-FRONT, ROYAL AIR FORCE H.Q. IN NORMANDY WAS ONLY TOO WILLING TO CO-OPERATE ...



THIS MESSAGE IS TO BE 'PHONED THROUGH TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS! THE COMMANDING OFFICER'S INSTRUCTIONS ARE TO GIVE IT TOP PRIORITY AND KEEP THE LINE OPEN!

AND SO, LINK BY LINK, A REMARKABLE CHAIN OF COMMUNICATION WAS FORGED -- TILL IN ITS PROGRESSIVE CIRCUIT IT REACHED DOWN TO THE COLONEL OF CARRADINE'S ARTILLERY UNIT ...



THE COLONEL'S FACE SADDENED ...



Chapter 3. LEGEND FULFILLED

MEANWHILE, ON THE SLOPES BELOW JEAN BAYARD'S CHATEAU, SERGEANT BOB MAXWELL AND THE MEN OF HIS PLATOON WERE NOT IDLE ...

WHAT'S THAT ARTILLERY CAPTAIN PLAYING AT, SERGEANT? WHAT MAKES HIM THINK WE CAN HOLD OUT HERE AGAINST THE JERRIES?

WE'VE GOT TO PUT UP A FIGHT AND DELAY THEM AS LONG AS WE CAN, DIXON. IF THINGS WORK OUT THE WAY THE CAPTAIN HOPES, OUR ARTILLERY WILL BE PLASTERING THE JERRIES AGAIN, PRETTY SOON!



AN URGENT CALL FROM ONE OF HIS MEN SWITCHED THE SERGEANT'S ATTENTION FROM CORPORAL DIXON ...

A JERRY PATROL, SERGEANT, THEY'RE MAKING FOR THE CHATEAU!

UNDER COVER, ALL OF YOU! AND HOLD YOUR FIRE TILL I GIVE THE WORD!



IN SKIRMISH-LINE, THE NAZIS MOVED WARILY UP THE WOODED HILLSIDE -- TIGHT LIPPED, MALLET-FACED S.S. TROOPERS WITH EYES NARROWED UNDER THEIR COAL-SCUTTLE HELMETS.



ON THEY CAME, SLOWLY, REMORSELESSLY. HUDDLED IN A HALF-DUG SLIT TRENCH, BOB FELT HIS SCALP CRAWL AS HE WATCHED THEM. HE SENSED HIS MEN WERE GROWING FIDGETY. HE OPENED HIS MOUTH, BUT FOR ONE GHASTLY MOMENT HIS VOICE FAILED HIM. THEN A HOARSE YELL BURST FROM HIS LIPS ...

RAPID
FIRE!





WHAT WAS LEFT OF THE NAZI PATROL TURNED AND FLED. BULLETS WHIPPED AMONG THE FUGITIVES, SPURRED THEM IN THEIR WILD ROUT. AS THE LAST OF THEM VANISHED FROM SIGHT, BOB MAXWELL CLIMBED TO HIS FEET...



IT WAS AS BOB TURNED THE CORNER OF THE WEST WING THAT HE HEARD RAISED VOICES.

I TELL YOU I'VE JUST TAKEN A LOOK FROM A WINDOW IN THE EAST WING AND VILLIERS-ROYAN IS FILLING UP WITH GERMANS! I CAN'T TURN DOWN A TARGET LIKE THAT! THE VILLAGE HAS GOT TO BE FLATTENED!



HESITANTLY, BOB STEPPED FORWARD ...



BOB FLUSHED, AND SWUNG ROUND TO RETRACE HIS STEPS. BAYARD LOOKED AFTER HIM SYMPATHETICALLY, THEN FIXED CARRADINE WITH A COLD EYE.



JEAN CHECKED THOSE CO-ORDINATES AGAINST A MAP TO ASSURE HIMSELF THERE WAS NO DECEPTION. ONLY THEN DID HE TRANSMIT THEM TO THE R.A.F. BASE IN ENGLAND, FOR RELAY BACK TO NORMANDY ON THE IMPROVISED LINK-UP ...



A FEW MINUTES LATER, A SALVO OF SHELLS WHOOSHED OVER ~ **BUT FROM THE ENEMY LINES!** THEY CURVED OUT OF THE EASTERN SKY AND SMASHED DOWN ON THE SLOPE WHERE BOB AND HIS MEN WERE STILL DIGGING-IN ...



AS THE ACRID SMOKE OF THE EXPLOSIONS BEGAN TO CLEAR, THE SERGEANT SPOTTED DIXON'S HAND CLAWING FEBBLY THROUGH A MASS OF EARTH THAT HAD AVALANCHED DOWN ON HIS SLIT TRENCH...



AT ANY MOMENT ANOTHER DEVASTATING LOAD OF EXPLOSIVE DEATH MIGHT PLUMMET FROM THE SKY UPON THEM. WITH FRANTIC ENERGY, BOB MAXWELL AND ANOTHER MAN SCRABBLED THE DIRT AWAY FROM THE ENTOMBED MAN. DIXON'S MOUTH AND EYES WERE FILLED WITH EARTH. YET, MIRACULOUSLY, HE WAS OTHERWISE UNHURT ...

THEN SUDDEN REACTION SET IN. DIXON JERKED SPASMODICALLY, BRUSHED THEM ROUGHLY ASIDE AND STARTED AT A MAD RUN FOR THE CHATEAU. BOB GUESSED AT ONCE WHAT WAS WRONG WITH HIM ...





FURIOUS WRATH BLAZED UP IN CARRADINE. HE SLAPPED DIXON VICIOUSLY ACROSS THE FACE, THE SMACK OF THE BLOW RINGING OUT LIKE A PISTOL SHOT...



IN EFFECT, IT WAS PROBABLY THE BEST CORRECTIVE THAT COULD HAVE BEEN APPLIED. IT BROUGHT THE CORPORAL INSTANTLY TO HIS SENSES. BUT THE REMEDY HAD BEEN APPLIED IN THE WRONG SPIRIT....



THE CAPTAIN INTERRUPTED HIM HARSHLY. THE FACT THAT BOB SEEMED PRETTY SHAKEN HIMSELF HAD NOT ESCAPED HIM ...

THE STANDARDS YOU SET FOR YOUR MEN ARE EVIDENTLY NOT MINE, MAXWELL. I'D SAY YOU LOOK AS WHITE ABOUT THE GILLS AS YOUR PRECIOUS CORPORAL. NOW DO AS I SAY AND MARCH HIM BACK TO YOUR PLATOON POSITION!



WITH GRIM, SET FACE, BOB OBEYED. AS HE WAS RETURNING TO THE NEWLY-DUG SLITS WITH THE NOW-SUBDUED DIXON, HE HEARD THE WHISTLE OF SHELLS AGAIN. BUT THIS TIME THEY WERE FROM BRITISH TWENTY-FIVE POUNDERS ...



THAT'S A COMFORTING SOUND WHEN IT'S TRAVELLING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. NOW JERRY'S ON THE RECEIVING END.

FROM HIS OBSERVATION-POST IN THE CHATEAU, CARRADINE NOTED THE FALL OF THE SHELLS APPRECIATIVELY ...

BANG-ON THE TARGET AREA! I'LL LET BAYARD KNOW HE CAN RADIO A MESSAGE TO THAT EFFECT.



HE REPORTED THE ACCURACY OF THE BRITISH FIRE TO JEAN. THEN A THUNDEROUS UPROAR ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CHATEAU TOLD HIM THE GERMANS HAD HURLED YET ANOTHER SALVO INTO THE SLOPE THERE.



HE PICTURED HIMSELF IN THE ROLE OF A MAN OF COOL, DISCIPLINED COURAGE. HIS SUPERB CONTROL AND STEEL-EDGED RESOLUTION IN THE FACE OF DANGER WOULD BE AN INSPIRATION TO ALL...



CAPTAIN CARRADINE CUT A FINE FIGURE AS HE STRODE DOWN THE SLOPE, WITH RAMROD BACK AND MARTINET'S STEP. HE CALLED TO BOB MAXWELL IN A VOICE OF AUTHORITY...



THE REST OF THE SENTENCE WAS BLOTTED OUT: THE AIR WAS SUDDENLY FILLED WITH A SCREAMING CRESCENDO OF NOISE AS SHELLS RAINED DOWN ON THE POSITION...



CARRADINE'S NERVES SNAPPED TO AN ELECTRIFYING JOLT OF HIGH TENSION TERROR AND HIS VOICE SOARED IN A YELL OF PANIC. HE SCUTTLED DOWN THE SLOPE WITH THE PRIDE SCORCHED OUT OF HIM, AND DIVED FRANTICALLY FOR COVER ...



HE LANDED BETWEEN BOB AND DIXON, AND CROUCHED LOW IN THE SLIT TRENCH. HIS MOUTH WAS HANGING OPEN, HIS EYES STARING DAZEDLY ...



BUT ONLY MEANINGLESS WORDS BUBBLED FROM CARRADINE'S SLACK LIPS ...



POOR DEVIL!
I KNOW HOW
HE FEELS!

HE TALKED BIG
WHEN HE WAS UP
THERE AT THE
CHATEAU, AND
MAYBE I SHOULDN'T
FEEL SORRY FOR
HIM. BUT, HECK,
I DO!

THE GERMAN GUNS WERE
PILING ON THE PRESSURE.
THE GROUND ERUPTED IN
GEYSERS OF EARTH AND
ROCK AS THOUGH IT HAD
BECOME VOLCANIC.
CARRADINE LOST HIS
HEAD. HE HAD NEVER
BEEN AT THE
WRONG END OF SHELLFIRE.



LET ME
OUT OF
HERE!

STAY WHERE YOU ARE,
SIR! YOU'LL HAVE A
CHANCE IF YOU KEEP
DOWN! IT'S CERTAIN
DEATH IF YOU DON'T!

EVEN IN THE FOX-HOLES, THE BALANCE WAS HEAVILY TILTED AGAINST SURVIVAL. JAGGED FRAGMENTS OF METAL THRESHED INTO THEM FROM TREE-BURSTS...



CORPORAL DIXON WAS KILLED OUTRIGHT AND CARRADINE BADLY WOUNDED IN THE SHOULDER. THEN ALL AT ONCE THE TERRIBLE BOMBARDMENT CEASED, AND A GRAVEYARD QUIET SETTLED OVER THE SLOPE...



BOB CALLED OUT, BUT NONE OF HIS MEN ANSWERED. SICK WITH GRIEF, HE WRENCHED HIS GAZE FROM THE SCENE OF DESOLATION.

I'D BETTER WARN BAYARD THAT THE GAME'S UP. MAYBE WE CAN GET CARRADINE BACK TO OUR OWN LINES BETWEEN US ~ IF THE JERRIES DON'T OVERRUN US BEFORE WE CAN PULL OUT!



HE STAGGERED TOWARDS THE CHATEAU WITH THE CAPTAIN. BEHIND HIM, THE SMOKE-CLOUDS LIFTED FROM GROUND CRATERED LIKE THE MOON'S SURFACE.



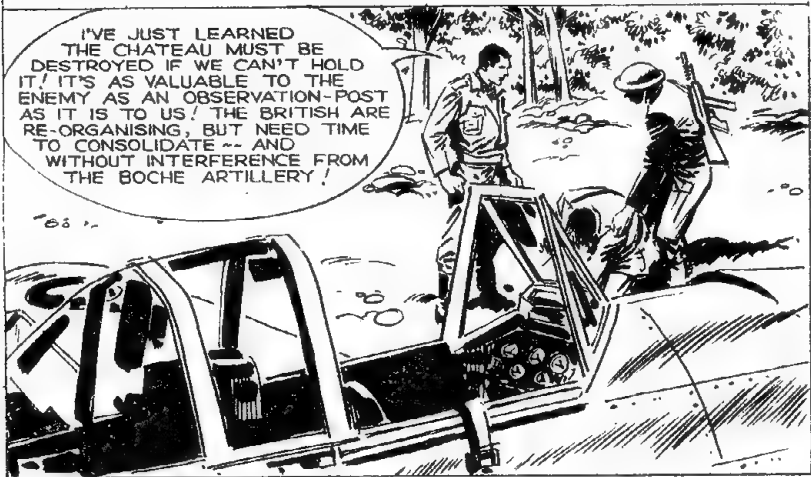
AS THE SMOKE UNFOLDED, A NAZI FORCE FROM VILLIERS-ROYAN SHOOK OUT INTO ASSAULT FORMATION ~ AT COMPANY-STRENGTH ...



DON'T PASS OUT ON ME NOW, CAPTAIN! I DOUBT IF I'LL MAKE IT IF YOU DO!

BOB HELPED CARRADINE TO THE CHATEAU'S WEST WING AND BAYARD'S STRANDED PLANE. BREATHLESSLY, HE GAVE THE FRENCHMAN HIS BAD NEWS--NEWS THAT FACED JEAN WITH A HEART-RENDING DECISION ...

I'VE JUST LEARNED THE CHATEAU MUST BE DESTROYED IF WE CAN'T HOLD IT! IT'S AS VALUABLE TO THE ENEMY AS AN OBSERVATION-POST AS IT IS TO US! THE BRITISH ARE RE-ORGANISING, BUT NEED TIME TO CONSOLIDATE-- AND WITHOUT INTERFERENCE FROM THE BOCHE ARTILLERY!



BAYARD SEEMED TO BRACE HIMSELF. HE WANTED TO SAVE HIS CHERISHED HOME, AS HE HAD SAVED VILLIERS-ROYAN. BUT NOW THE LIVES OF MEN FIGHTING FOR THE LIBERATION OF HIS COUNTRY WERE AT STAKE ...

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

RADIO THE FIRE-ORDER THAT WILL MEAN THE END OF THE CHATEAU! I CAN'T LET THE BOCHES USE IT TO DIRECT THEIR GUNS ON THE BRITISH!





BAYARD'S ARGUMENT MADE SENSE. BOB COULD SEE THAT, AND HE COMPLIED WITH THE FRENCHMAN'S ORDER ...



DELIBERATELY JEAN REITERATED THE SIGNAL TO ENSURE THERE SHOULD BE NO MISUNDERSTANDING. AFTER THAT, HE WAITED TILL IT HAD BEEN RELAYED AND ACKNOWLEDGED OVER THE COMMUNICATIONS-CIRCUIT. ONLY THEN DID HE LOOK TO HIS OWN SAFETY ...

ALORS, NOW
I GO ~~ BEFORE
THE BOCHES SHOW
UP ~~ AND BEFORE
THE SHELLS COME
POURING OVER !

HE WAS WHEELING FROM HIS PLANE WHEN HE HEARD THE SCUFFLE OF HURRYING FEET. INVOLUNTARILY HE DUG FOR A PISTOL HE CARRIED IN HIS FLYING-BOOT ~~ AND TOOK QUICK AIM AS A GERMAN OFFICER SWUNG INTO VIEW ...



THE GERMAN FELL, BUT IN THE SAME INSTANT OTHERS ROUNDED THE CORNER. RIFLE SHOTS CRACKED OUT...



BOB MAXWELL FLUNG UP HIS TOMMY GUN TO HIS SHOULDER AND CUT LOOSE WITH A DEADLY BURST. MANY GERMANS FELL AND OTHERS DARTED FOR COVER IN THE CHATEAU...



NEXT MOMENT, A DELUGE OF BRITISH SHELLS RAINED ON TO THE BUILDING. THEY SPLIT THE CHATEAU WIDE OPEN IN A WELTER OF FLAME AND DEBRIS. MASONRY CRASHED DOWN, ENGULFING JEAN AND HIS PLANE ...



AWESTRUCK, BOB AND CARRADINE WATCHED AN ANCIENT PROPHECY'S FULFILMENT AS FLIGHT AFTER FLIGHT OF SHELLS HAMMERED INTO THE CHATEAU. AND AT LAST IT WAS A HEAP OF RUBBLE -- THE SEPULCHRE OF JEAN BAYARD AND A HUNDRED GERMANS WHO HAD DIED AMONG ITS RUINS ...



THEY TURNED TOWARDS THE WEST. FOR A TIME THEY WERE SILENT. BUT AT LAST CARRADINE SPOKE AGAIN, AND THE TONE OF HIS VOICE WAS AS CLOSE TO HUMILITY AS HIS CHARACTER WOULD ALLOW ...



BOB COULD NOT ANSWER... HIS MIND WAS TOO FULL OF HIS OWN MOMENTS OF DREAD. BUT HE WAS THINKING, TOO, THAT HE WOULD HOLD ON TO THE HARD-EARNED TAPES HE WORE. AFTER ALL, HE HAD NOT CRACKED. NO, HE HAD NOT CRACKED...

LOOK, MAXWELL! BRITISH ARMoured CARS!



THEN THE SERGEANT LOOKED BACK TOWARDS THE DISTANT, SMOULDERING WRECKAGE OF A ONCE-PROUD CHATEAU. IT WAS A BLACKENED MEMORIAL NOW TO A MAN WHO HAD SACRIFICED IT, AND HIS LIFE ALONG WITH IT...

BAYARD WAS THE ONE WITH COURAGE, SIR. HE WAS A HERO.



BOB MAXWELL HAD NEVER SEEN HIMSELF AS A HERO. HE NEVER DID UNDERSTAND IT WAS MEN OF HIS OWN BREED WHO WERE THE TRULY VALOROUS IN WAR. MEN WHO KNEW THE COLD GRIP OF FEAR, BUT HAD WHAT IT TAKES TO CONQUER IT...

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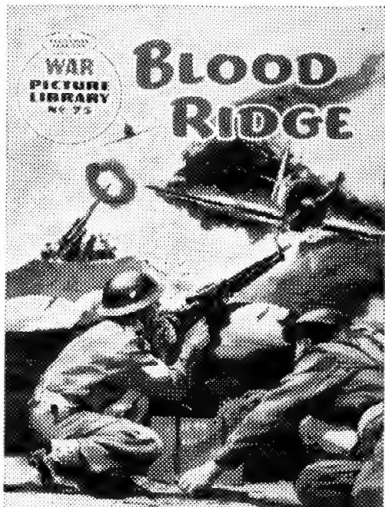
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